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ABSTRACT

The evolution of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) and certification process is traced. The challenges posed by combining, for certification purposes, the scores from internal and external assessments of school candidates are discussed in the face of the low reliability of teachers' (internal) assessments. The previous certification procedure was based entirely on a one-shot, terminal, and external examination conducted by the WAEC. The new procedure is intended to combine advantages of continuous assessment (CASS) by teachers with those of terminal assessment (TASS). So far, there has been no official attempt to assess the validity and reliability of CASS scores submitted to the WAEC by schools in member countries. It must be assumed that disparities between schools and the qualitative difference in terms of validity and reliability between CASS and TASS scores are very wide. Examining the relationship between CASS over 3 years and TASS for 2,000 randomly selected Nigerian students for English and mathematics confirms a generally low correlation between CASS and TASS. The WAEC has chosen statistical moderation using standardization as an approach to resolving these problems. It is hoped that the experience of Nigeria in combining the two types of assessments will assist other countries as they adopt the new WAEC procedures. Six tables and two figures illustrate the discussion. (SLD)

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THE CHALLENGES OF COMBINING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT IN CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS: THE WEST AFRICAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The West African Examinations Council, now 40 years old, has established itself as the oldest and largest evaluation agent in the sub-region. It has provided aptitude tests for various purposes, conducted evaluation-oriented training workshops for teachers and organised seminars, symposia and conferences on current issues in education and educational evaluation.

However, the major function of the WAEC being the conduct of certificate examinations at the secondary school level in the English-speaking West African countries, it has devoted most of its research attention to testing techniques and innovative approaches to educational evaluation. This paper therefore examines the evolution of the WAEC Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) which is essentially an external examination. The paper then focuses on the challenges posed by combining, for certification purposes, scores from internal and external assessment of school candidates in the face of notoriously low reliability of teachers' (internal) assessment.

The challenges explored in the paper are seen as having been compounded by such factors as societal pressure on the school system, general dearth of evaluation experts in the sub-region and the deficiency of secondary schools in the skills of educational assessment. Attention is also given in the paper to some remediation measures especially external moderation of internal assessment designed to improve the quality of the SSCE. Measures that could improve the general standard of education evaluation in the entire sub-region are also discussed.

THE CHALLENGES OF COMBINING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT IN A CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION: THE WEST AFRICAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL EXPERIENCE*

1. INTRODUCTION

The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) was set up in 1952 as a corporate body charged with the responsibility of conducting examinations in the public interest in West Africa. The ordinance which established it also empowered it to conduct such other examinations and award certificates with the proviso that such certificates do not represent a lower standard of attainment than equivalent certificates of examining authorities in the United Kingdom.

Over the years, four of the five member countires of the WAEC viz Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia have shared an educational system whichfeatured five years of secondary education leading to the award of the West African School Certificate or General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level (SC/GCE O/L). This is followed by two years of post secondary education leading to the award of Higher School Certificate (HSC) or the General Certificate of Education, Advanced Level (GCE A/L). High achieving SC/GCE candidates are selected into 4-year university programmes while candidates who attained the required level of passes in the GCE A/L go into 3-year programmes. This step-wise educational system could be referred to as the 6-5-4/6-5-2-3 system, having regard to the number of years it normally takes students to complete each stage of the system.

Both the SC/GCE O/L and the HSC/GCE A/L are centrally developed, administered and processed by the WAEC for the member countires using common standards and procedures. The examinations are entirely external and the award of certificates at the two levels (School certificate/ Ordinary/Level and Higher School Certificate/Advanced Level) are based exclusively on candidates' scores in these examinations. Although the WAEC trains and uses thousands of school teachers in the processes of setting and scoring the examinations, whatever assessments and evaluations are done in the schools make no imput in the certification process.

*Footnote: My sincere appreciation goes to Dr. S.O. Adeyegbe and other staff of the Research Division of WAEC who prepared a draft from which this paper emerged.

These examinations have had a unifying effect on the educational policies, systems and curricula of the member countries. However, like the educational systems themselves, the examinations which complement them, have been criticised over the years as being geared towards the production of white-collar job seekers. This criticism is based on the observation that if at all any skills in the affective and psychomotor domains are perchance taught and learned in the school, they are not visibly or adequately reflected in the external examinations on which the certificates of secondary education are exclusively based. The WAEC practicals were considered inadequate.

In response to this criticism, Nigeria, a WAEC member country, painstakingly planned and installed between 1976 and 1988 a new system of education referred to as 6-3-3-4. The system consists of six years of primary education, three years each of Junior and Senior Secondary Education and four years of tertiary education.

2. THE NEW SYSTEM OF EDUCATION AND ITS CURRICULUM

In Nigeria, the 6-3-3-4 system of education stipulates that the products of the secondary stages will develop socially desirable attitudes and values and acquire appropriate manipulative skills in addition to acquiring knowledge about matters of fact which was the obsession of the old system. The curriculum, especially at the secondary school level, was accordingly diversified with copious vocational education components. It was hoped that the new secondary education system would produce more job creators than mere job seekers.

However, the special feature of the new system which constitutes the focus of this paper is the introduction of Continuous Assessment (CASS) as a formal and mandatory component of the certification procedure. According to the policy, Continuous (or internal) Assessemnt (CASS) by teachers during the 3 years of senior secondary school (SSS) should contribute 30 per cent of the certification criteria while Terminal Assessment (TASS), i.e. the external examination conducted by the WAEC at the end of the third (final) year of SSS contributes 70 per cent. The task of weighting, standardising and combining the CASS and TASS scores for certification purposes is carried out by the WAEC, an examining body that has no direct involvement in the teaching-learning process. The

first batch of Nigerian Senior Secondary School students assessed for certification under this system passed out of the system in 1988 and were awarded various grades of the Senior School Certificate (SSC). The first batch of Ghanaian SSS students will be assessed for SSC in 1993.

3. THE ADVANTAGES OF INCORPORATING CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT IN THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS

It should be restated here, for emphasis, that the pre-existing certification procedure was based entirely on the one-shot terminal (and external) examination conducted by the WAEC. That examination, the 6C/GCE took no cognisance of whatever internal assessment might have accompanied classroom teaching-learning processes. By contrast, the new certification procedure is intended to combine the advantages of Continuous Assessment with those of Terminal Assessment.

As has been observed by Adeyegbe (1992) a system such as CASS which allows the classroom teacher a measure of involvement in the evaluation of students is a virile approach. Among the major advantages of CASS are that:

(1) because of its comprehensive and cumulative nature, it encourages a fairer judgement of the achievements of a student than a single-shot and single-domain examination;

(2) because of its systematic approach and formative orientation, it facilitates and promotes good guidance-counselling practices in schools;

(3) CASS motivates students toward consistent learning effort throughout a course of learning, since assessment (stimulus and reinforcement) accompany learning;

(4) CASS affords the testing of some learning outcomes which may not be easily or adequately tested by written examinations;

(5) CASS brings together the roles of educator and assessor, thus stimulating a more professional attitude on the part of teachers; and

(6) a combination of CASS with TASS makes it possible to gain a more representative view of a student's capabilities and achievements.

4. PROBLEMS POSED BY CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT IN CERTIFICATION

Accompanying the above advantages of CASS are a number of problems and challenges which have arisen in the process of combining CASS with TASS scores. For teachers, parents and, even more importantly, experts in educational measurement, the major concern is the possible dilution of the standards of WAEC certificates at the secondary school level.

According to Mansaray (1988), because of the High quality of the certificates that the WAEC has issued over the years, the organisation and its certificates have enjoyed considerable respect nationally and internationally. The introduction of CASS with its defects discussed below has been seen as a threat to the standards and acceptability of WAEC certificates.

It was in order to reduce this threat that a WAEC officer (Awuwoloye, 1988) has suggested some criteria to guide the procedure for combining the scores obtained from CASS and TASS. Some of such criteria are that for the purpose of a successful combination of CASS and TASS,

(a) all components of the assessment scores (i.e. both CASS and TASS components) must be valid and reliable.

(b) the actual and planned weighting must coincide within reasonable limits.

(c) the standards of the teacher assessment (i.e. CASS) should be reasonably comparable from centre to centre (i.e. school to school).

The procedure for combining CASS with TASS by the WAEC has been guided largely by these criteria. However, that procedure has been beset by a number of technical problems arising from decisions and operations which are outside the purview of the WAEC.

For instance, the issue of the weighting of the CASS and TASS scores which are combined for the determination of SSCE results has been resolved on 'a priori' basis by the Ministry of Education. For the time being, the ratio of CASS to TASS is 30:70 for the purpose of the Senior School Certification.

The problems of the validity and reliability of CASS and TASS while being reasonably addressed within the constraints of the educational system, still hang fire. With decades of dynamic test development and test administration practices behind her, the WAEC has met the expected standards with regard to the validity and reliability of itw own tests. Post examination analysis of the tests (and test items) are also being done on a regular basis to verify the quality of the TASS scores.

There has however been no official attempt to assess the validity and reliability of the CASS scores turned in to WAEC by the schools for combining with the TASS scores to determine SSCE results. For over a decade now, the Ministries of Education (Federal and States), with the assistance of University Faculties of Education and the WAEC have mounted emergency training programmes for several batches of serving teachers to enable them to meet the demands of continuous assessment. However, on account of limited resources to support this emergency training and deficiences in the basic teacher preparation programmes, more than half of the teachers who carry out continuous assessment in any of the SSSs still lack the necessary minimum skills for this function. In effect, the variance in assessment skills within any individual school is as much as that between different schools.

The social climate in which the schools and teachers operate is a confounding factor in the quality of CASS scores. The high premium placed on the value of high grades in the SSCE both for employment and for admission into universities and other tertiary institutions exert a great deal of pressure on SSS teachers to 'show good'. Boosting of scores in CASS is therefore common. Failing CASS scores are rare even in mediocre schools. Parent's pressure on teachers contributes much to this.

On the basis of the above facts, it must be assumed that the disparity in assessment skills as between the WAEC and the schools are wide. Also, and ipso facto, the qualitative difference in terms of validity and reliability between CASS and TASS scores must be very wide indeed. Here lies the threat to the quality of WAEC certificates and therefore the challenge to the integrity of the WAEC.

5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CASS AND TASS SCORES COMBINED FOR THE AWARD OF SSC GRADES

An empirical verification of the assumed lack of comparability between the CASS and TASS scores which are combined to produce the SSCE results is reported below. The two subjects involved in this test, English Language and Mathematics, are the key subjects in the core curriculum of the SSS.

The raw scores of 2,000 students randomly selected from a total of 92,530 SSCE candidates from different schools were identified, listed and considered in each of English and Mathematics. These were both of the CASS scores awarded by teachers during the three years of SSS and also of the TASS scores awarded by WAEC at the end of the third year of the SSS course. The means of the CASS and TASS scores of each school and in each of the subjects were compared. In addition the standard deviation of the scores were compared and the product moment correlations between TASS and CASS determined to show the extent to which the scores were related. The results of these analyses are as displayed in the following tables.

TABLE 1: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT (CASS) AND TERMINAL ASSESSEMENT (TASS) RAW/STANDARDISED SCORES FOR 1988 SSCE MATHEMATICS

SCHOOL CENTRE NUMBER	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	CASS PAIRWISE CORRELATIONS			TASS Vs CASS CORRELATIONS			REMARKS ON CASS-TASS CORRELATION*
		Yr 1 & Yr II	Yr 1 & Yr III	Yr II & Yr III	TASS 2 Yr 1	TASS 2 Yr II	TASS 2 YrIII	
A	340	0.79	0.56	0.61	0.53	0.56	0.57	Sign.*
B	175	0.64	0.52	0.59	0.44	0.52	0.62	Sign.
C	116	0.84	0.77	0.75	0.86	0.81	0.79	Sign.
D	175	0.56	0.48	0.57	0.46	0.43	0.45	Sign.
E	254	0.72	0.51	0.58	0.50	0.51	0.72	Sign.
F	212	0.85	0.52	0.61	0.80	0.74	0.50	Sign.
G	194	0.82	0.56	0.62	0.65	0.74	0.74	Sign.
H	121	0.63	0.53	0.80	0.56	0.63	0.66	Sign.
I	201	0.93	0.80	0.89	0.74	0.82	0.84	Sign.
J	220	0.57	0.48	0.53	0.63	0.73	0.54	Sign.

* Significant $p \leq 0.05$

TABLE 2: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT (CASS) AND TERMINAL ASSESSMENT (TASS) RAW/STANDARDISED SCORES FOR 1988 SSCE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

SCHOOL CENTRE NUMBER	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	CASS PAIRWISE CORRELLATIONS			TASS Vs CASS CORRELATION			REMARKS ON CASS-TASS CORRELATION
		Yr 1 & Yr II	Yr 1 & Yr III	Yr II & Yr III	TASS & Yr 1	TASS & Yr II	TASS & Yr III	
A	338	0.55	0.45	0.43	0.47	0.33	0.31	Not Sign
B	174	0.31	0.21	0.22	0.26	0.21	0.51	Not Sign
C	116	0.81	0.71	0.74	0.77	0.75	0.72	Sign.
D	175	0.55	0.49	0.56	0.44	0.47	0.53	Not Sign
E	230	0.57	0.25	0.25	0.28	0.26	0.68	Sign.*
F	187	0.47	0.53	0.54	0.75	0.36	0.50	Sign
G	194	0.66	0.43	0.55	0.64	0.69	0.58	Not Sign
H	121	0.75	0.57	0.57	0.44	0.38	0.31	Not Sign
I	201	0.82	0.57	0.56	0.52	0.51	0.46	Not Sign
J	219	0.25	0.13	0.19	0.35	0.38	0.36	Not Sign

* Significant, $p \leq 0.05$

TABLE 3: COMPARISON BETWEEN CASS AND TASS MEAN SCORES ($\bar{x}$) FOR 1988 SSCE MATHEMATICS

CENTRE NUMBER	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	CASS	TASS	Di*
A	340	43.1	35.6	- 7.5
B	175	36.1	40.0	3.9
C	116	51.5	35.7	- 15.8
D	175	55.6	49.9	- 5.7
E	254	46.2	35.7	- 10.5
F	212	46.3	32.6	- 13.7
G	194	62.0	50.0	- 12.0
H	121	57.3	55.4	- 1.9
I	201	59.8	50.7	- 9.1
J	220	51.7	39.6	- 12.1
TOTAL	2008			Di* = TASS - CASS

NB In all cases except one, CASS scores represent gross over-rating compared to TASS.

TABLE 4: COMPARISON BETWEEN CASS AND TASS MEAN SCORES ($\bar{x}$) FOR 1988 SSCE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

CENTRE NUMBER	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	CASS	TASS	D1*
A	338	41.0	42.8	+ 1.8
B	174	51.5	53.6	+ 2.1
C	116	64.1	56.3	- 7.3
D	173	68.1	56.9	- 11.2
E	230	51.5	47.0	- 4.5
F	187	32.6	34.3	+ 1.7
G	194	76.1	55.8	- 11.3
H	121	56.6	56.6	- 0.4
I	201	63.4	57.3	- 6.1
J	219	60.3	49.0	- 11.3
TOTAL	1953			D1* = TASS - CASS

NB In seven out of ten schools, CASS scores represent gross over-rating compared to TASS.

TABLE 5: COMPARISON BETWEEN CASS AND TASS STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR 1988 SSCE MATHEMATICS

CENTRE NUMBER	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	CASS STANDARD DEVIATIONS			TASS STANDARD DEVIATIONS
		YEAR I	YEAR II	YEAR III	
A	340	13.5	15.1	16.9	12.9
B	175	16.5	16.4	22.9	19.8
C	116	16.6	19.3	22.8	18.8
D	175	15.7	14.6	17.9	16.3
E	254	15.4	15.6	23.4	22.6
F	212	16.4	15.3	12.4	17.8
G	194	14.5	14.7	16.1	18.9
H	121	18.5	15.1	12.7	20.1
I	201	16.8	16.8	21.7	22.2
J	220	14.5	14.8	14.9	19.8

TABLE 6: COMPARISON BETWEEN CASS AND TASS STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR 1988 SSCE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

SCHOOL CENTRE NUMBER	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	CASS STANDARD DEVIATIONS			TASS STANDARD DEVIATIONS
		YEAR I	YEAR II	YEAR III	
A	338	10.7	9.0	11.8	9.8
B	174	10.4	9.0	16.0	13.2
C	116	8.6	8.8	12.3	12.1
D	173	10.1	10.8	11.3	12.1
E	230	10.6	9.8	19.0	18.5
F	187	12.8	14.3	11.8	8.8
G	194	9.8	9.0	13.4	9.6
H	121	8.8	7.8	8.6	11.2
I	201	8.7	8.5	11.0	11.8
J	219	8.8	9.2	14.9	9.2

The differences between CASS and TASS scores are vividly illustrated in the graphical presentation of the means of the scores from the two types of measures. In the two graphs below, the solid diagonal line in the middle represent the points where the means of the CASS and TASS scores are equal. The two broken diagonal lines indicate the acceptable limits of the differences between the two types of measures. Schools whose scores fall outside the graph area enclosed by the two broken lines are those in which the differences between the means of CASS and TASS scores are too large to be acceptable. Schools in this category were found to outnumber those with acceptable differential mean scores.

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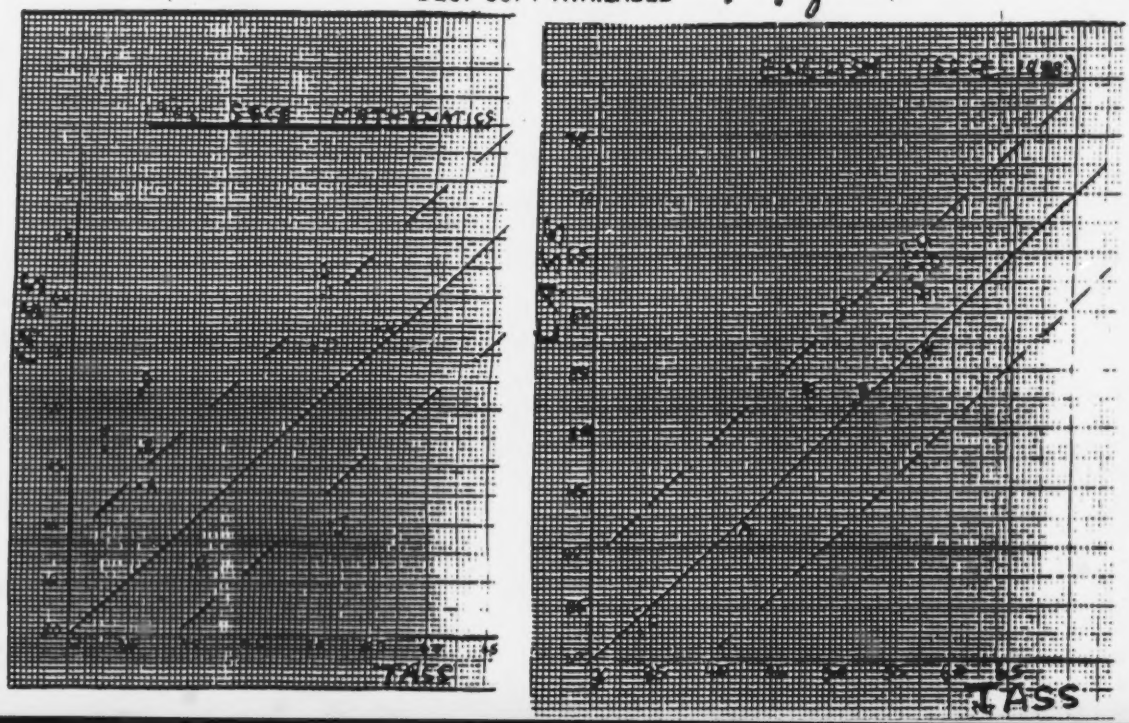

The findings of this empirical mini-research show that, generally speaking, there was low correlation between CASS and TASS scores. Considering that the examination syllabus buttressing WAEC terminal tests (and the TASS scores) was based on the school curriculum buttressing the CASS scores, this low correlation is unlikely to have arisen from differences in the content involved in CASS and TASS. The discrepancies observed between the two types of assessment are more likely to have arisen largely from the lack of expertise in measurement among the teachers and the absence of a common standard of excellence or a coordinating authority for the assessment done in the various schools in a state and in different states of Nigeria.

6. THE WAEC RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE

(1) The Alternatives Considered

In reaction to the threat posed by the low quality of the CASS scores to the integrity of both the SSC and the WAEC, the certification authority has considered a variety of practicable approaches to the technical problem of the low quality of CASS scores. The three approaches explored by Awuwoloye (1988) are as follows:-

(a) Moderation by "inspection" - an approach that would impose common procedures and standards on schools by the Ministry of Education or the WAEC or both acting jointly.

(b) Moderation by consortium or consensus - an approach involving the active expert action by school teachers or groups of measurement experts jointly sponsored by schools and/or Ministry of Education.

(c) Statistical moderation - an approach which does not concern itself with the manner in which CASS scores are generated but rather attempts to clean off the effects of variation in school standards before combining the scores with the WAEC (TASS) scores.

(2) Statistical Moderation: The Preferred Approach

The WAEC has chosen the last mentioned approach namely, statistical moderation. This approach does not involve WAEC in tampering with school processes or in any other act that could be considered prejudicial to the new educational policy. Equally

important, the chosen approach does not impose on the WAEC the monumental financial burden of sending measurement experts to guide or "inspect" assessment processes in the several thousands of Nigerian secondary schools, even if those experts were to suddenly become available by some miracle!

Statistical moderation aims at making CASS scores comparable from school to school through the technique of standardization. The stages of the technique as applied to the SSCE are as follows:-

(a) Computation of the means and standard deviations of the CASS and TASS scores in respect of each examination subject in each participating school;

(b) Scaling and Rank-ordering of CASS scores on the basis of the TASS scores rank-order using the statistics obtained from stage (a);

(c) Computation of standardized or T-scores from all the adjusted CASS and TASS scores;

(d) Computation of weighted aggregates first for CASS and TASS scores separately and then for the combined CASS and TASS scores;

(e) Generating weighted and standardized grade boundaries according to which grades ranging from 1 or Excellent to 9 or Very Poor/Failed will be awarded to examination candidates once their individual CASS and TASS scores are known.

The statistical moderation technique adopted by the WAEC is complemented by other techniques designed to solve other problems in the certification procedure.

(3) Prediction for Missing scores

The most important other problem that plagues the hybrid SSCE of the WAEC is that of the missing scores which could and often does arise from any of the following causes:-

(1) CASS score casualties during transcription in the school or transmission from school to the WAEC;

(2) Candidate failure to write one or more papers of a subject at WAEC examination leading to imcomplete TASS score in an examination subject for which the same candidate has CASS scores and must be assessed;

(3) Transfer of pupil from one SSS to another without the transfer of his CASS dossier leading to total lack or late availability of CASS scores for a candidate who has TASS scores.

The WAEC solution to the problem of the missing scores begins with the ranking of scores for both CASS and TASS for the school(s) concerned which is a stage in the statistical moderation already outlined above. The prediction of the missing scores is based on a simple linear relationship established between two component papers of an examination one paper of which predicts the other to a given extent most of the time. A candidate therefore need not be given a score of zero in the subject component for which he was absent.

7. ADDITIONAL REMEDIES FOR CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT PROBLEMS

The WAEC is aware of the intrinsic values of continuous assessment and has sympathy for the national aspiration toward an examination system which is integrated with and contributes possitively to improved curricular and instructional practices. For these reasons, the organisation has continued to explore new procedures or intensify old ones for the purpose of reducing the deficiences of continuous assessment as currently installed and operated in Nigerian schools.

Among the procedures and measures in plan are the following:-

(1) Continuation of continuous assessment workshops organised by the WAEC for secondary school teachers to improve their assessment skills;

(2) Random monitoring of CASS procedures and techniques in use in the schools;

(3) Informing the schools of defects (over-rating, under-rating and capricious/inconsistent rating) observed in the CASS scores submitted to the WAEC for use in processing the SSCE results;

(4) Development of standardised tests and mini-tests for curriculum modules in all of cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains which school teachers can administer and score for the purpose of generating CASS scores.

The WAEC also takes cognisance of improvement efforts within the educational systems and intends to fully support the Ministries of Education which have started to apply some quality control measures to the assessment instruments and procedures employed by SSS teachers.

8. CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this paper to highlight the evolution of the mandatory use by WAEC of CASS along with TASS in the assessment of secondary school pupils' achievement for certification purposes in Nigeria. The journey so far has not been smooth in the face of notoriously low reliability of teachers' (internal) assessment.

There is, however, a great possibility that by the time the new SSCE still being developed in Ghana replaces the SC/GCE in that country, the positive effects of the Nigerian experience will have become evident. There is indeed a good prospect for the evolvement of an examination system that feeds back possitively and constructively into the teaching-learning system in the entire West African sub-region served by the WAEC.

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